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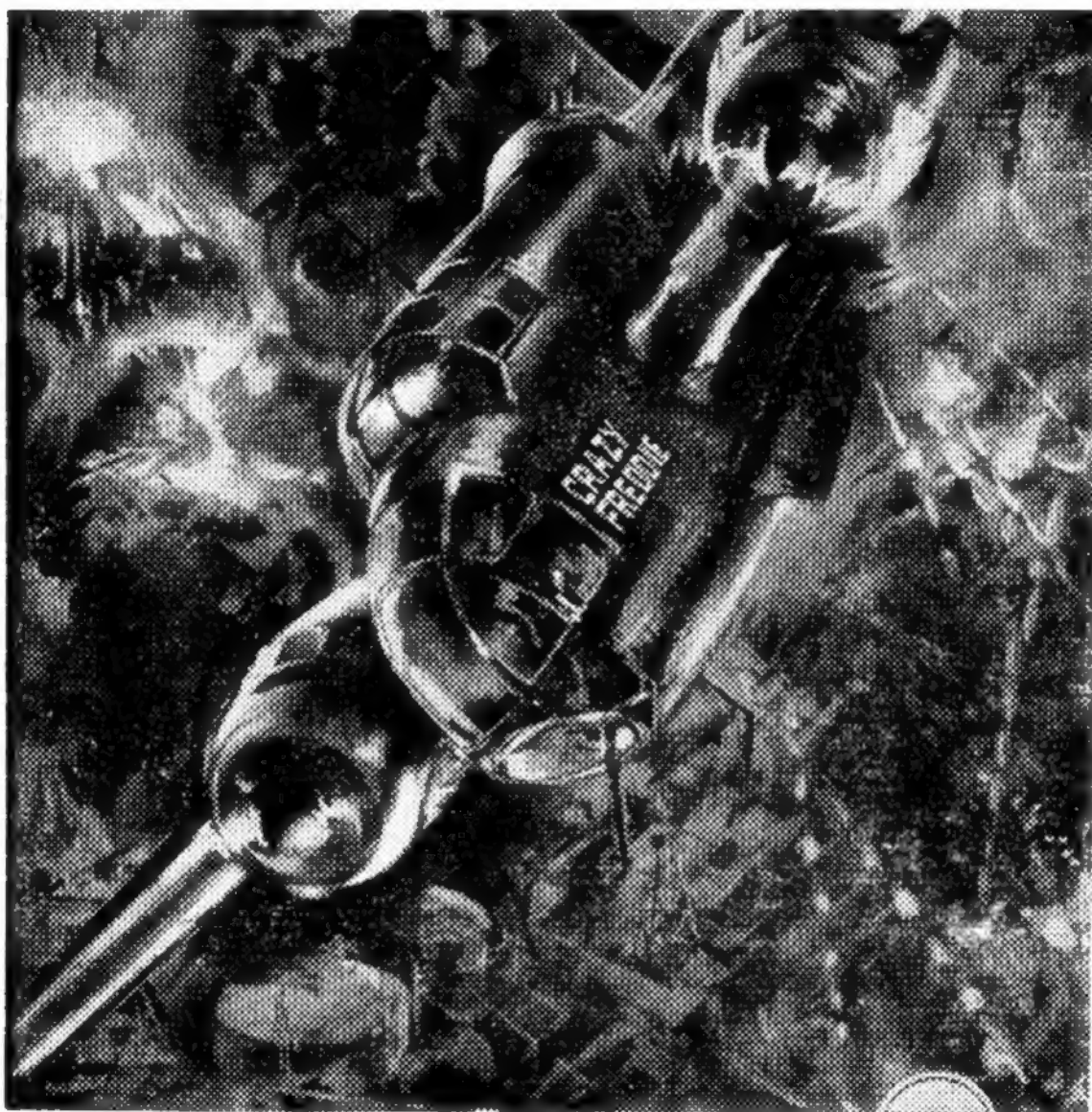
# ***GUN DECK***





Through the pounding flak of the savage enemy sky,  
and then . . .

## **BOMBS GONE !**



For tingling excitement, don't miss

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# GUN DECK

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THE GRIM AND UNSPECTACULAR WORK OF MINESWEEPING NEEDED A SPECIAL, COLD-BLOODED TYPE OF COURAGE. TO SAIL DELIBERATELY INTO WATERS SOWN WITH HIDDEN DEATH, OFTEN UNDER ENEMY GUNS, WOULD DAUNT MANY A MAN WHO WOULD FACE OVERWHELMING ODDS IN BATTLE -- PROVIDED HE COULD HIT BACK. YET SOMETIMES THE GALLANT MINESWEEPERS DID GET THEIR CHANCE TO HIT BACK AT THE ENEMY.

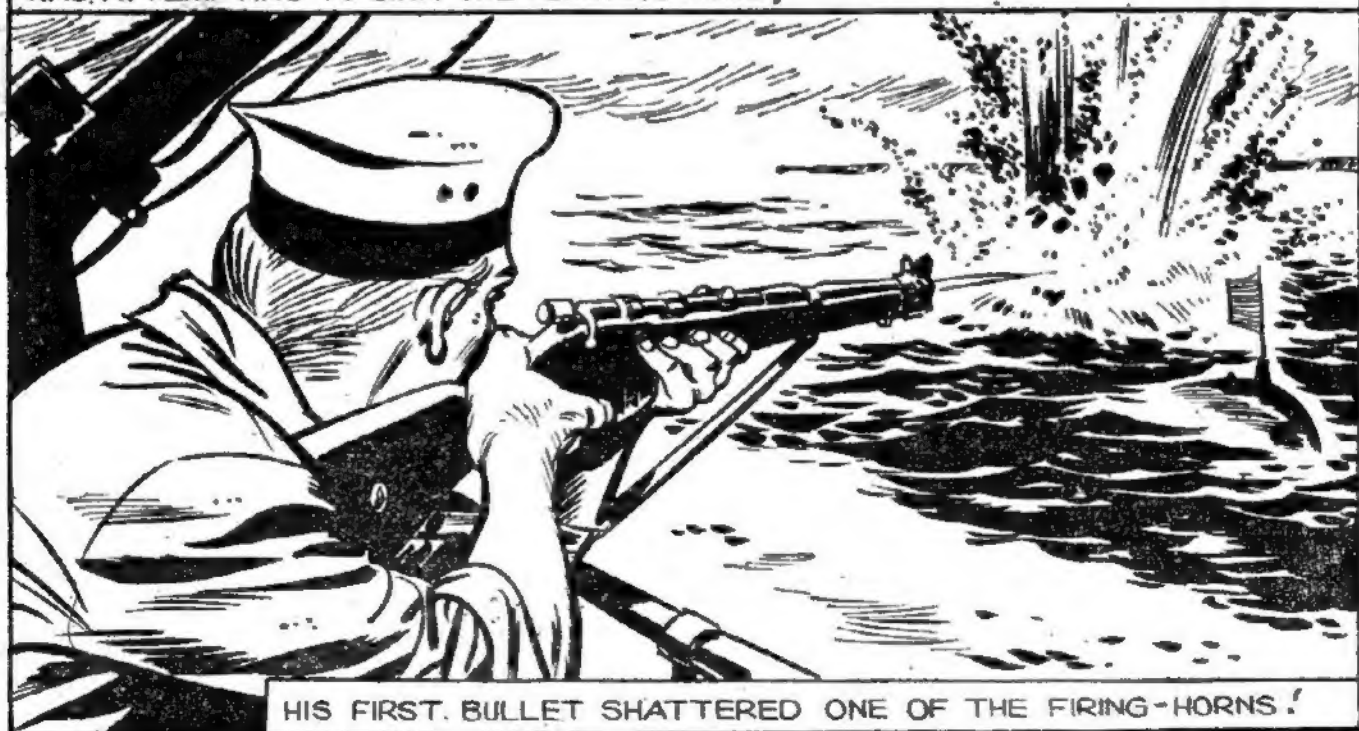
# Chapter 1 UNEQUAL BATTLE

EARLY IN 1944, THE 27TH. MINESWEEPING FLOTILLA OPERATING FLEET SWEEPERS OF THE ALGERINE CLASS, WAS SENT TO CLEAR AN ITALIAN MINEFIELD OFF THE ADRIATIC COAST BEFORE A LANDING WAS MADE BY AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT CRAFT.

GARN! BET YOU WON'T EVEN HIT IT FIRST TIME, GINGER,



H.M.S. DIRK WAS ONE OF THE NEWEST OF THE NAVY'S MINESWEEPERS. OF 950 TONS DISPLACEMENT, SHE WAS FITTED WITH ASDIC EQUIPMENT. BESIDES HER TWO OERLIKONS AMIDSHIPS, SHE HAD A FOUR-INCH GUN ON HER FORE-DECK, AND A MAN TO FIRE IT... THE SAME MAN WHO AT THAT MOMENT WAS ATTEMPTING TO SINK THE FLOATING MINE!



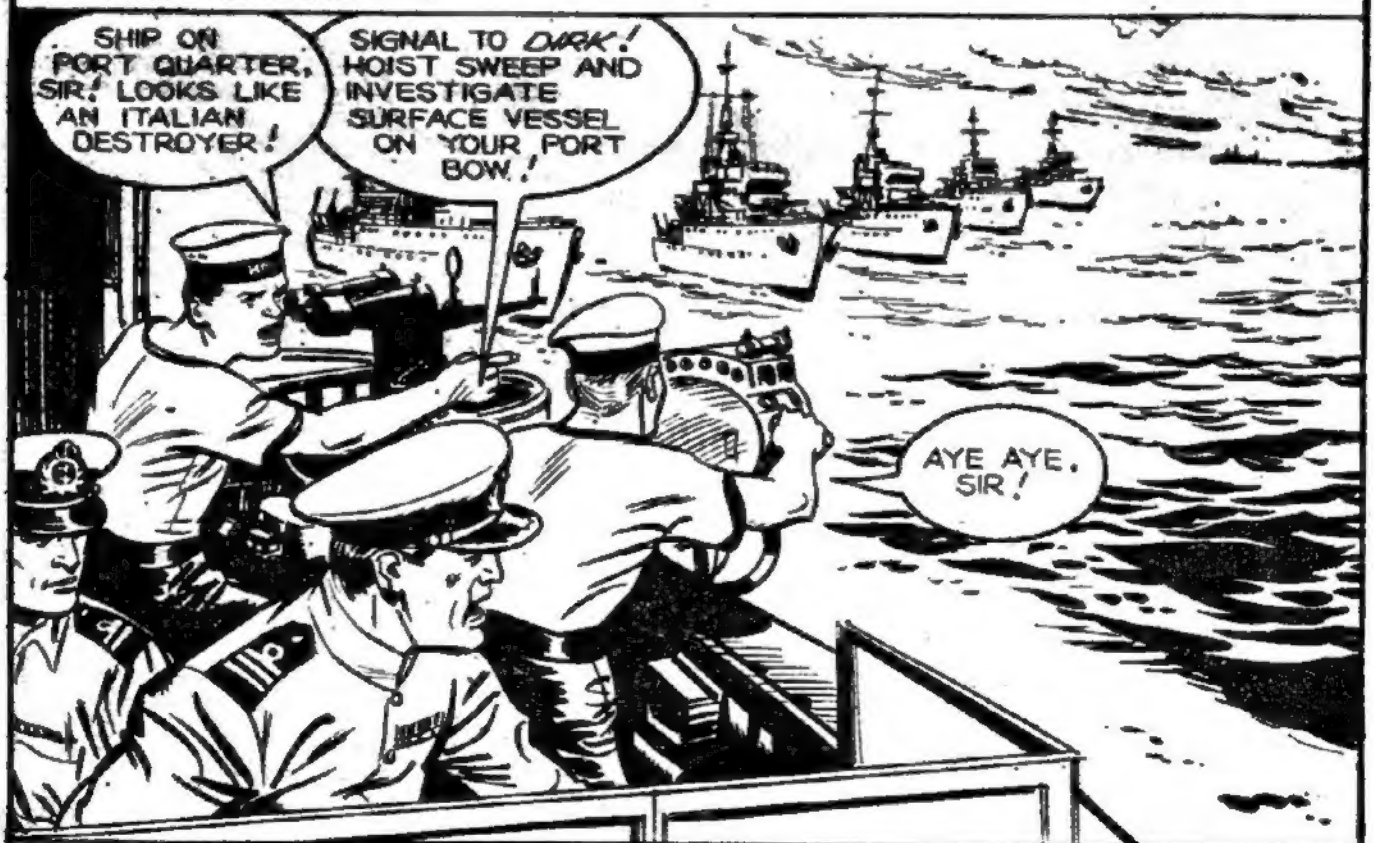
HIS FIRST BULLET SHATTERED ONE OF THE FIRING-HORNS!



ABLE SEAMAN GINGER BRANNIGAN'S ACTION STATION WAS AT THE CONTROLS OF THE BIG GUN IN THE BOWS, BUT DURING SWEEPING OPERATIONS, ARMED WITH A LEE-ENFIELD RIFLE, HE ACTED AS A ONE-MAN MINE DISPOSAL SQUAD.



GINGER WAS A CHEERFUL COCKNEY WITH A QUICK TONGUE AND A DEADLY EYE. TILL NOW, THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN HAD GIVEN HIM NO CHANCE TO USE HIS BELOVED FOUR-INCH. BUT AT THIS MOMENT, FAR TO PORT OF THE SIX MINESWEEPERS' ....



## Gun Deck

THE FLOTILLA LEADER'S SIGNAL LAMP ALERTED *H.M.S. DIRK* ON THE TAIL-END OF THE FORMATION. HER YOUNG SKIPPER, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER TOM SCOTT, GAVE A CALM ORDER.



THE SWEEPING PARTY AT THE *DIRK*'S STERN WHICH HAD BEEN LULLED BY THE GRIM MONOTONY OF THEIR TASK, WERE SUDDENLY GALVANISED BY THE BLARING VOICE OF THE LOUD HAILER.



EXULTANTLY, GINGER BRANNIGAN SET OFF PAST THE DIRECTION FINDER PLATFORM TO GET THE FOUR-INCH READY FOR -- HE HOPED -- HOT ACTION.

WHAT'S THE HURRY, GINGER? FOUND A TARGET FOR THAT POP-GUN OF YOURS?

YOU JUST GIVE ME THE RANGE, LOFTY, AND I'LL FIND THE TARGET!



ON THE *DIRK'S* BRIDGE, THE SKIPPER FOCUSED HIS BINOCULARS ON THAT LEAN, GREY SHAPE SLIDING OUT OF THE SHORE HAZE.

IT'S AN EYTIE DESTROYER, ALL RIGHT! IS THAT SWEEP IN YET, NUMBER ONE? WE'LL NEED ALL THE SPEED WE'VE GOT WHEN THE FIREWORKS START!

ALL RIGHT, BRANNIGAN, TAKE IT STEADY! NO NEED TO BURST A BLOOD VESSEL!





## Gun Deck

THE *SAVOIA*, 2,000 TONS, WAS A PRE-WAR ITALIAN DESTROYER WITH A NEWLY-INSTALLED AND DEADLY SIX-INCH ARMAMENT. NOW SHE SWEEPED OUT CONTEMPTUOUSLY TO DEAL WITH THE SIX SMALL BRITISH INTERLOPERS.



THE MINESWEEPER  
IN THE REAR TURNS  
TO MEET US,  
CAPTAIN!

WE WILL SINK HER BEFORE  
DEALING WITH THE OTHERS,  
THEN! GIVE HER A SALVO!

THE ITALIAN SIX-INCH GUNS LEERED ROUND IN THE *DUKE*'S DIRECTION, AND A SALVO OF HEAVY SHELLS HUMMED ACROSS THE MILE BETWEEN THE UNEQUAL COMBATANTS.



BRIDGE FROM  
STERN! SWEEP  
INBOARD, SIR!

JUST IN TIME,  
MEN! THE  
EYDIE'S  
GETTING  
CROSS!



THAT FIRST ITALIAN SALVO SPOUTED WATER ON TO THE *DIRK*'S DECK, BUT THE LITTLE SHIP WAS ALREADY GATHERING SPEED.

TARGET ONE  
MILE / DEFLECTION  
RIGHT TWO-FOUR  
DEGREES !



AT HER TOP SPEED OF FOURTEEN KNOTS, THE MINESWEEPER WAS NO MATCH FOR THE FAST ITALIAN DESTROYER, BUT SHE WAS MANNED WITH SKILL, AND COURAGE, AND CONFIDENCE. AND IN HER BOWS SHE HAD A STING...



SENT ON ITS FLIGHTED PATH BY THE YOUNG COCKNEY GUNNER, THE FOUR-INCH SHELL HOWLED WICKEDLY ACROSS THE NARROWING GAP BETWEEN THE TWO SHIPS -- AND FELL SHORT.

THE POOR FOOLS, THEY SEEK TO HURT US WITH THEIR LITTLE GUN ! WE WILL SHOW THEM THAT THE ITALIAN NAVY DOES NOT TOLERATE SUCH IMPUDENCE ! ALL GUNS THAT BEAR --- **RAPID FIRE !**



## Gun Deck

AS THE SIX-INCH GUNS TRAVERSED TOWARDS THE BRITISH MINESWEEPER, THREE MILES AWAY IN THE VAN OF THE FLOTILLA, THE COMMANDER WATCHED EVENTS ANXIOUSLY.

HADN'T WE BETTER TAKE IN SWEEPS, COMMANDER, AND GIVE THE *DIRK* A HAND?

WE'LL COMPLETE THIS LEG FIRST, LIEUTENANT! THIS MINEFIELD MUST BE SWEEPED BEFORE THE LANDING BARGES COME IN AT DAWN! TOM SCOTT KNOWS HOW TO LOOK AFTER HIMSELF!



THE COMMANDER'S CONFIDENCE IN TOM SCOTT WAS NOT MISPLACED. COOLLY THE YOUNG SKIPPER OF THE *DIRK* STEADIED HIS EAGER CREW.

TAKE YOUR TIME, GUN CREW! ONE DIRECT HIT WILL SEND THAT EYTIE SCURRYING BACK TO PORT!

ONE DIRECT HIT COMING UP, SIR!



TO THE COCKNEY GUNNER, THIS WAS A PERSONAL DUEL... ABLE SEAMAN GINGER BRANNIGAN VERSUS THE *SAVOIA*. AND HE HAD NO DOUBT AS TO WHO WOULD WIN.

THIS ONE'S GOING TO BE SPOT ON!






## Gun Deck

EVEN AS THE BARREL OF THE *DIRK*'S FOUR-INCH RECOILED, ANOTHER SALVO FROM THE DESTROYER STRADDLED THE MINESWEEPER.



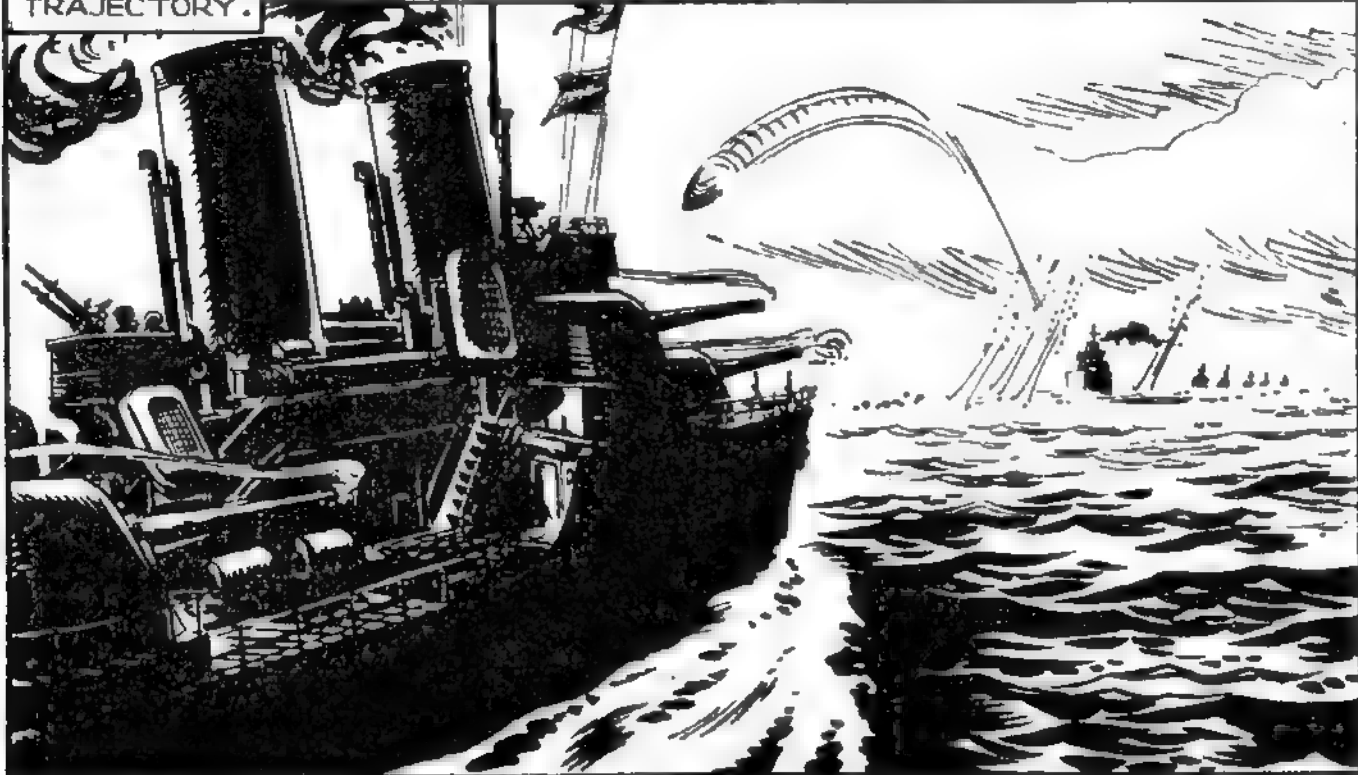
GINGER HAD BETTER LAND ONE ON THAT ITALIAN SOON! HE'S GETTING HIS EYE IN!

THE *DIRK*'S SECOND SHELL WAS ON ITS WAY. AND ON THE DESTROYER, AT LEAST TWO OF THE ITALIAN CREW DID NOT SHARE THEIR CAPTAIN'S BOASTFUL OPTIMISM ...



AH, THEY ARE ALL VERY BRAVE ON THE BRIDGE, BEPPO, BUT IF ONE PICCOLO SHELL FALLS HERE ... **WHOOOSH!**

THE DESTROYER WAS AN OLD ONE. THOUGH ITS GUNS WERE NEW AND POWERFUL, ITS PLATES WERE THIN, AND ITS AMMUNITION SUPPLY BADLY PLANNED AND EXPOSED. THE *DIRK*'S SHELL DROPPED IN A DEADLY TRAJECTORY.



AT THE WEAKEST POINT ON THE WHOLE ENEMY WARSHIP, GINGER BRANNIGAN'S FOUR-INCH SHELL SLAMMED VICIOUSLY HOME.

AAGH!





THE SHARP EXPLOSION ON THE OPEN HATCH OF THE AMMUNITION STORE SPREAD CONSTERNATION ACROSS THE DECKS...



A FIERY TEN SECONDS LATER, THE LICKING FLAMES REACHED THE DESTROYER'S MAGAZINE...



## Gun Deck

SEA AND SKY SHOOK TO THE CRACKING ROAR OF THAT EXPLOSION. A BALEFUL GLARE ETCHED THE SHATTERED HULL OF THE ITALIAN DESTROYER, TORN APART BY ITS OWN AMMUNITION.



GINGER BRANNIGAN FELT A GLOW OF PRIDE IN HIS HEART AS BRIGHT, AS THE FIRE HE HAD STARTED ON HIS VICTIM'S DECK.





EAGER WATCHERS ON THE OTHER FIVE MINESWEEPERS OF THE FLOTILLA HAD SEEN THE CRUSHING VICTORY OF THEIR COMPANION SHIP. BUT THERE WAS STILL AN EXACTING JOB TO BE DONE.



FOR A FEW BRIEF MOMENTS, THE *DIRK* HOVERED NEAR THE BLAZING WRECK OF ITS BIG ADVERSARY, BUT THE ENEMY'S COAST WAS NEAR, THERE WAS NO NEED TO PICK UP SURVIVORS OR TO STAY ...



SOBERLY, THE TOUGH LITTLE MINESWEEPER REJOINED THE FLOTILLA AND PREPARED TO STREAM ITS SWEEPING GEAR. BUT THE MEN WERE STILL EXCITED.

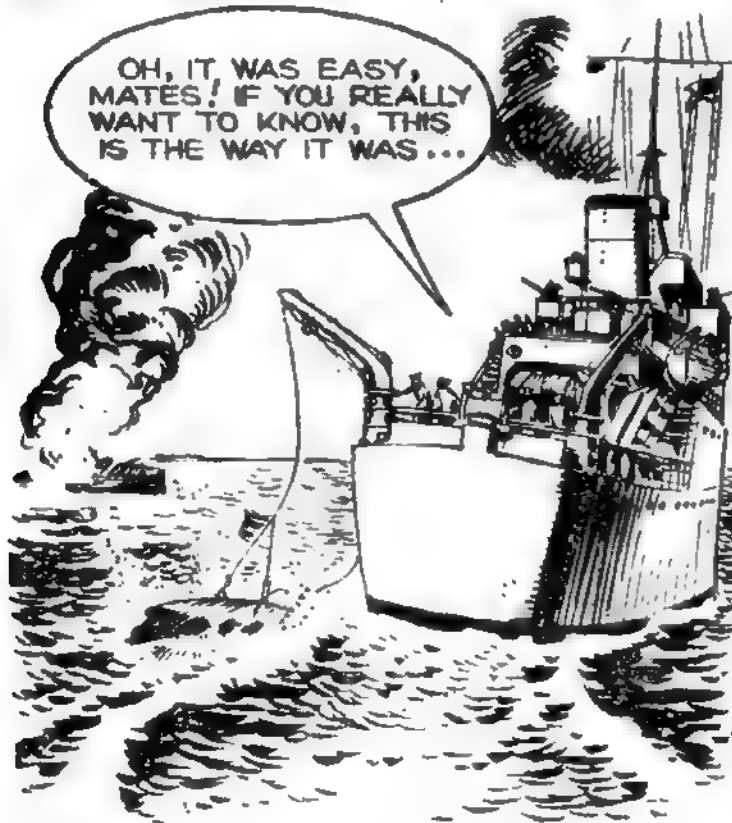
BY GOLLY! I WONDER HOW OLD GINGER DID IT?

DON'T WORRY-- HE'LL TELL US!



AND OF ALL THE MEN ON *H.M.S. DIRK* ONE MAN HAD A RIGHT TO BE EXCITED-- ABLE SEAMAN GINGER BRANNIGAN.

OH, IT WAS EASY, MATES! IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW, THIS IS THE WAY IT WAS...



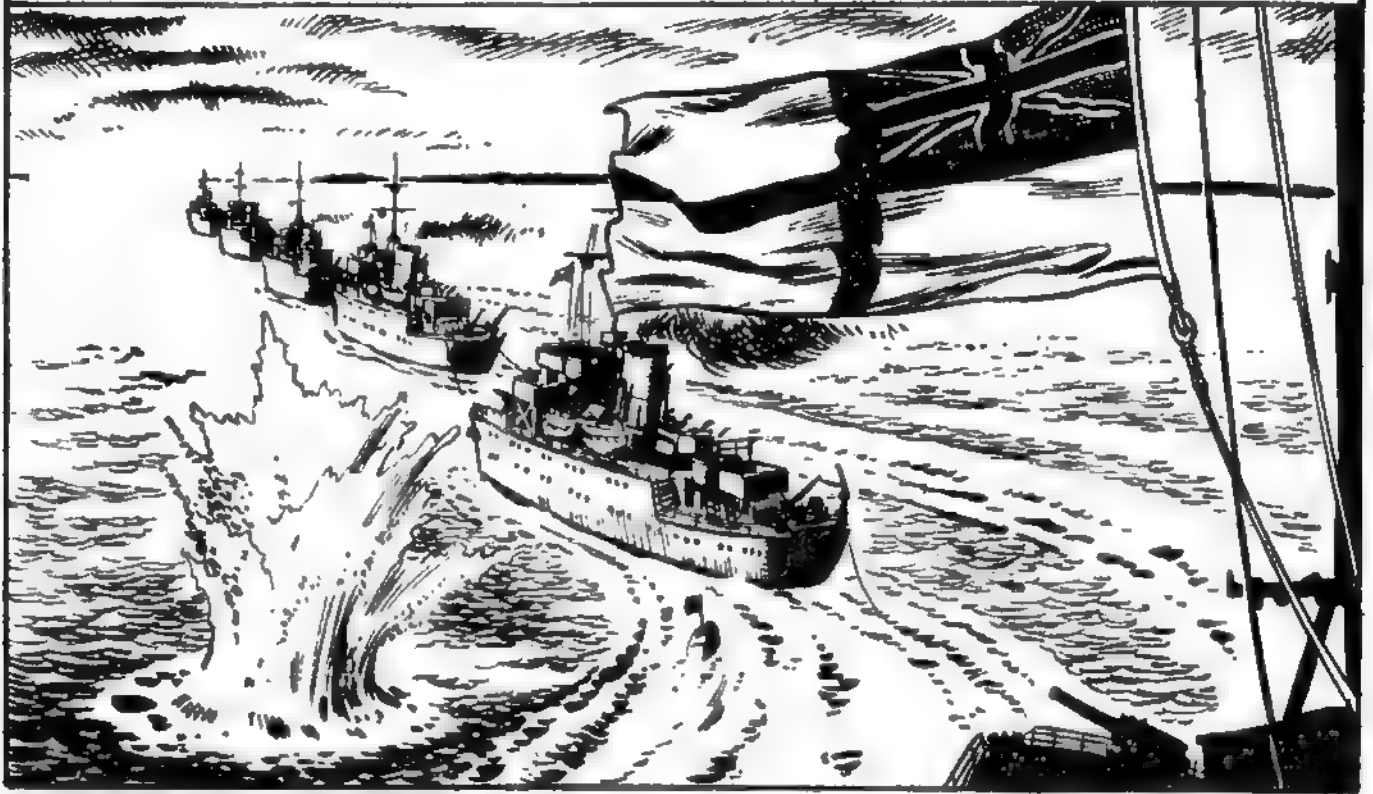
THE PARAVANE AWAY AND HIS TASK COMPLETED FOR THE MOMENT, LEADING SEAMAN WHITEY BAKER LOOKED UP AT THE GROUP OF RATINGS ON THE AFTER-DECK AND GRINNED...

I JUST LINED UP THE GUN ON THE EYTIE'S MAST AND LET FLY! THAT'S ALL!

GOOD OLD GINGER! HE'S IN HIS ELEMENT!



THE ELATED ABLE SEAMAN WOULD GO ON TALKING FOR A LONG TIME YET ... WHILE THE FLOTILLA PLOUGHED BACKWARD AND FORWARD ACROSS THE THREATENING MINEFIELD AND CUT LOOSE THE IRON SPHERES OF DEATH.



AT DUSK THE JOB WAS DONE. AT DAWN THE NEXT DAY, THE LANDING BARGES OF THE ASSAULT FORCE COULD SAIL SAFELY IN TO BREACH THE ENEMY COAST. THE 27TH MINESWEEPING FLOTILLA RETURNED SATISFIED TO PORT.



THERE GOES THE LANDING PARTY, SIR! THEY GO IN AT DAWN TOMORROW, DON'T THEY?

YES, NUMBER ONE! IT'S LUCKY WE GOT THAT MINEFIELD SWEEPED FOR THEM DESPITE THAT EYIE DESTROYER! AND THAT REMINDS ME, SEND THAT GUNNERY RATING TO MY CABIN TOMORROW MORNING!





THE YOUNG GUNNER STUMBLED GRATEFULLY OUT OF THE SKIPPER'S CABIN, HIS HEAD FULL OF GLORY, AND LEANED ON THE DECK RAIL.



IF THE SKIPPER THINKS I'M AN IMPORTANT MAN ON THIS SHIP, I MUST BE! I WONDER IF HE'S DONE ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT THAT DESTROYER I SANK? I THINK I'LL GO AND SEE SPARKS!

HEARD THE BUZZ, MATES? THE FLOTILLA'S BEING SENT BACK TO GOOD OLD POMPEY!

A NEW AND EVEN MORE EXCITING THOUGHT HAD STRUCK THE YOUNG GUNNER. HARDLY HEARING HIS SHIPMATE'S NEWS, GINGER HURRIED BELOW DECKS TO THE W/T CABIN. THERE ...



WOTCHER, SPARKS! SKIPPER BEEN SENDING ANY MESSAGES LATELY?

WIRELESS OPERATOR

ONLY ONE TO THE C-IN-C ABOUT OUR RECALL TO GOOD OLD BLIGHTY! YOU HEARD THAT BUZZ, DIDN'T YOU?

## Gun Deck

GINGER'S CAREFULLY NONCOMMITTAL QUESTION DID NOT BRING THE REPLY HE WANTED. HE TRIED AGAIN ...

YES, I HEARD THE BUZZ. I WONDERED IF HE'D SENT A SIGNAL ABOUT THAT DESTROYER I ... I MEAN WE SANK.

OH THAT! DON'T TELL ME YOU WERE HOPING HE'D RECOMMEND YOU FOR A GONG, GINGER? BLOW ME DOWN, I BELIEVE YOU WERE! WELL, I'M SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU, BUT HE HASN'T!



TO GINGER'S DISMAY, THE TELEGRAPHIST HAD QUICKLY SEEN THE REASON BEHIND HIS QUESTION. HIS EARS BURNED AS HE WALKED AWAY. THE NEWS WOULD BE ALL OVER THE MESS-DECKS INSIDE AN HOUR.

HEY, TUB! HEARD ABOUT OLD GINGER? WANTED TO KNOW IF THE SKIPPER WAS GOING TO GIVE HIM A MEDAL FOR YESTERDAY'S JOB!

BLOW IT! I LAID MYSELF WIDE OPEN THERE!

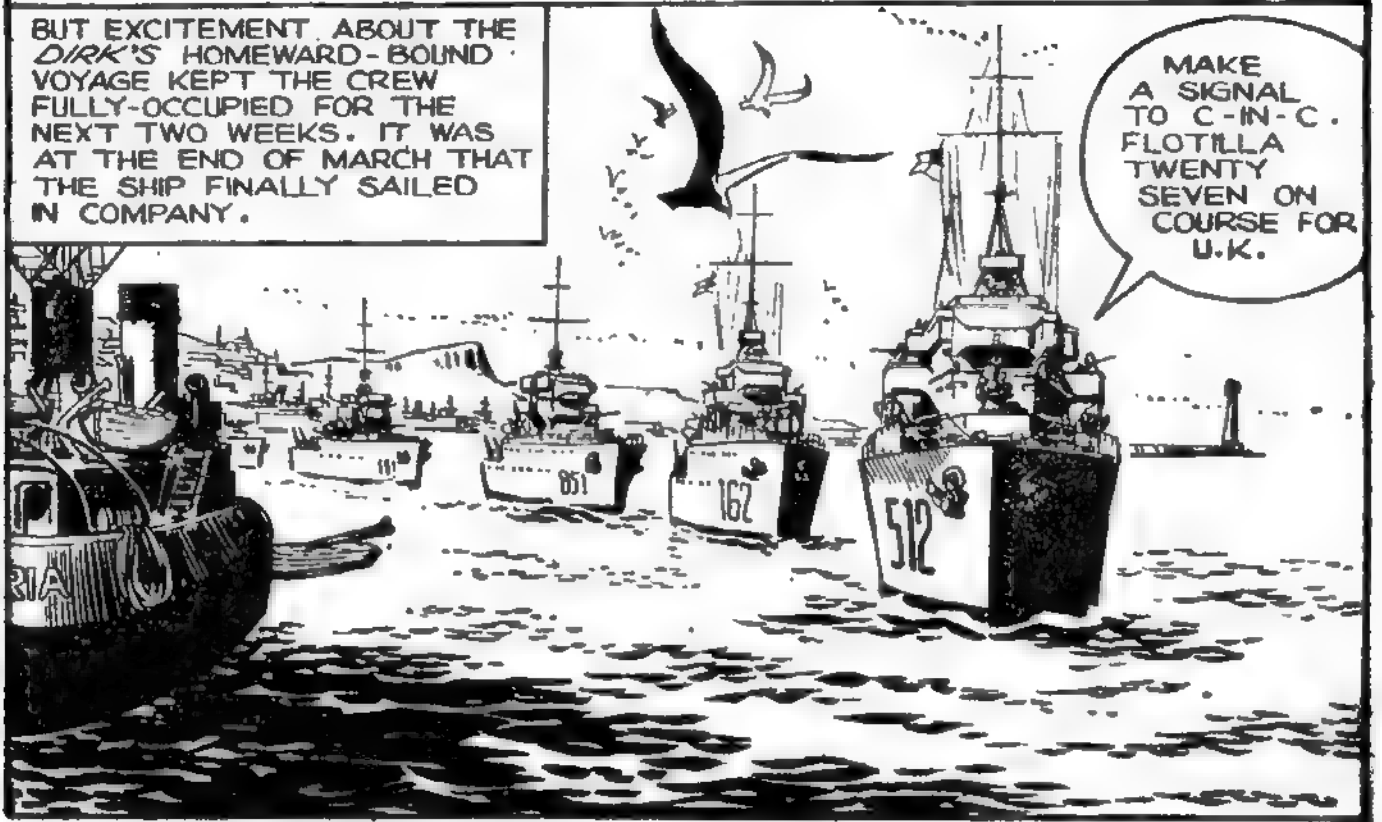




## Chapter 2 COURSE TO DESTRUCTION

BUT EXCITEMENT ABOUT THE DIRK'S HOMEWARD-BOUND VOYAGE KEPT THE CREW FULLY-OCCUPIED FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. IT WAS AT THE END OF MARCH THAT THE SHIP FINALLY SAILED IN COMPANY.

MAKE A SIGNAL TO C-IN-C. FLOTILLA TWENTY SEVEN ON COURSE FOR U.K.



ONCE AT SEA, AND THRASHING AT A STEADY TWELVE KNOTS ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN, THE DIRK'S CREW REMEMBERED THAT JUICY TITBIT ABOUT GINGER BRANNIGAN ...

DID YOU HEAR WHY THEY'RE SENDING THE FLOTILLA HOME, STASH? WINSTON WANTS TO GIVE GINGER HIS V.C. PERSONALLY!

YOU'VE GOT IT WRONG, TANKY! IT WAS THE KING, NOT WINSTON!



FOR AN INSTANT, GINGER BLUSHED AT THOSE SARCASTIC WITTICISMS. THEN PRIDE LIFTED HIS HEAD HIGH AND HE TURNED TO FACE THE MOCKERS.

LESS OF IT, MEN! IF YOU COULD HANDLE A SWAB AS WELL AS GINGER HANDLES HIS GUN, YOU'D GET THIS JOB FINISHED QUICKER!



YOU HEAR THE KILLICK, MATES! YOU GET ON WITH THE SWABBING AND LEAVE THE FIGHTING TO ME!

HIS SHIPMATES' JOKES, WHICH SHOWED NO SIGNS OF SLACKENING AS TIME PASSED, SERVED ONLY TO MAKE GINGER BRANNIGAN MORE COCKY THAN HE HAD BEEN BEFORE. IT WAS HIS WAY OF DEFENDING HIMSELF.

COR, HARK AT BIGHEAD BRANNIGAN!

ALL RIGHT, YOU CAN LAUGH, BUT IT WASN'T ME WHO SAID I'D SAVED THE OLD DIRK FROM BEING SUNK! IT WAS THE SKIPPER HIMSELF!



"BIGHEAD" THEY WERE CALLING HIM NOW. WELL, LET THEM! HE KNEW WHAT THE TRUTH WAS, EVEN IF THEY REFUSED TO ADMIT IT.

STOW IT, GINGER! NO ONE'S DENYING YOU LANDED THAT SHELL ON THE EYTIE PACKET! BUT THE REST OF US HERE HAD A HAND IN IT, TOO!

NOT YOU, YOU DIDN'T! YOUR JOB'S TO GET THE SWEEPS OUT AND IN! I'M THE ONLY ONE ON THIS BLINKING SKIVVY OF A SHIP WHO DOES ANY REAL FIGHTING!



WHAT HAD STARTED AS A GOOD-HUMOURED JOKE WAS BEGINNING TO BE A BITTER GULF BETWEEN THE YOUNG GUNNER AND HIS SHIPMATES. AND THAT WAS SOMETHING LEADING SEAMAN WHITEY BAKER WOULD NOT TOLERATE IN HIS WATCH.



LOOK, GINGER, ALL THE WAY FROM THE MED. YOU'VE BEEN SHOOTING OFF YOUR MOUTH! I'M ABOUT SICK OF IT, SEE! YOU TAKE MY ADVICE AND PIPE DOWN!

THE OTHERS STARTED IT, WHITEY! BESIDES, IT'S TRUE <sup>in</sup> I **AM** THE ONE WHO DOES ALL THE FIGHTING WHEN THE BALLOON GOES UP!

THE *DIRK* SAILED HOME, MANNED BY MANY OFFICERS AND MEN EACH WITH HIS OWN SPECIAL SKILL, BUT THERE WAS A STUBBORN REBEL ON BOARD...

SO HELP ME, HE REALLY BELIEVES IT! WELL, HE'LL LEARN THE TRUTH ONE OF THESE DAYS!

HARBOUR STATIONS! SPECIAL SEA DUTY MEN, CLOSE UP!





THE 27TH MINESWEEPING FLOTILLA WAS HOME AGAIN AT PORTSMOUTH AFTER TWO YEARS OF FOREIGN SERVICE. AND NOW A NEW SIGNIFICANT TASK AWAITED ITS OFFICERS AND MEN.

SIGNAL TO FLOTILLA!  
ALL COMMANDING OFFICERS  
WILL ATTEND CONFERENCE  
ON BOARD FLOTILLA  
LEADER AT TWENTY  
TWO HUNDRED!



AS DARKNESS FELL, FIVE COMMANDING OFFICERS WERE FERRIED ACROSS TO THE FLOTILLA LEADER MOORED IN MID-STREAM.

WELL, GENTLEMEN, YOU CAN PROBABLY GUESS WHY WE'VE BEEN SENT BACK TO POMPEY! THE BIG PUSH IS COMING! OUR JOB WILL BE TO SWEEP IN AHEAD OF THE INVASION FLEET! YOU'VE GOT LESS THAN A MONTH TO GET YOUR CREWS AND GEAR UP TO SCRATCH!



THE LONG-AWAITED INVASION OF EUROPE WAS FAST DRAWING NEAR, AND IN THAT GRAND ASSAULT, THE LITTLE MINESWEEPERS WOULD HAVE A VITAL TASK TO CARRY OUT. BUT ON THE DARK, GINGER AND HIS SHIPMATES WERE STILL BICKERING AT EACH OTHER..



LIEUTENANT COMMANDER SCOTT READ THE SIGNAL FROM C-IN-C, PORTSMOUTH.

THEY'VE GOT AN URGENT JOB FOR US, NUMBER ONE! A MERCHANT PACKET HAS BLOWN UP IN THE SWEEP CHANNEL SEVENTY MILES SOUTH OF POMPEY. IT'S ONE OF THE CHANNELS THROUGH THE MINEFIELD TO BE USED BY THE INVASION FLEET. WE'VE GOT TO CHECK THAT IT'S CLEAR!

I'LL CALL THE DUTY WATCH ON DECK AT ONCE, SIR!



QUICKLY, THE DIRK'S CREW MADE READY FOR SEA. AND ONE LONELY YOUNG GUNNER WAS GLAD...

LET GO  
FORWARD!  
LET GO,  
AFT!

PERHAPS I'LL  
GET A CHANCE THIS  
TRIP TO SHOW THOSE  
DECK SWABBERS  
THAT I WAS  
RIGHT!





AS THE *DIXIE* CLEARED COWES ROADS, ITS COMMANDING OFFICER AND ITS ABLE SEAMAN GUNNER MADE THEIR RESPECTIVE PLANS.

WE SHOULD REACH THE MINEFIELD INSIDE THREE HOURS, NUMBER ONE! CALL ME WHEN WE'RE NEARLY THERE!

I'LL HAVE MY BUBBLY RATION AND GET MY HEAD DOWN FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS! I'LL NEED TO BE FRESH IN CASE I GET A CHANCE TO USE THE FOUR-INCH!



BARELY TWO HOURS HAD PASSED WHEN THE LOOK-OUT ON THE *DIXIE*'S BRIDGE REPORTED SHIPS AHEAD. IN A FEW MOMENTS, THE FIRST LIEUTENANT WAS ABLE TO SEE THAT THEY WERE PICKING UP SURVIVORS. PUZZLED BY THE DEVELOPMENT, HE SENT WORD TO THE CAPTAIN...

SIGNALMAN, CALL THE CAPTAIN! STAND BY TO STREAM SWEEPS!



THE MERCHANTMAN HAD BEEN REPORTED SUNK BY A MINE. BUT IF THESE SURVIVORS AND THE FLOTSAM OF THE SUNKEN SHIP WERE ANYTHING TO GO BY, THE MINE MUST HAVE BEEN FAR OUT OF POSITION.

THEY MUST HAVE GOT THE POSITION OF THAT MERCHANTMAN WRONG, SIR! SHE SANK ABOUT HERE, BUT THE MINEFIELD IS TEN MILES AHEAD!

THAT'S ODD, NUMBER ONE! THE MINEFIELD WAS ONLY LAID SIX MONTHS AGO, TOO! I DOUBT IF ANY OF THE MINES WOULD HAVE DRIFTED THIS FAR! NOW, I WONDER ...



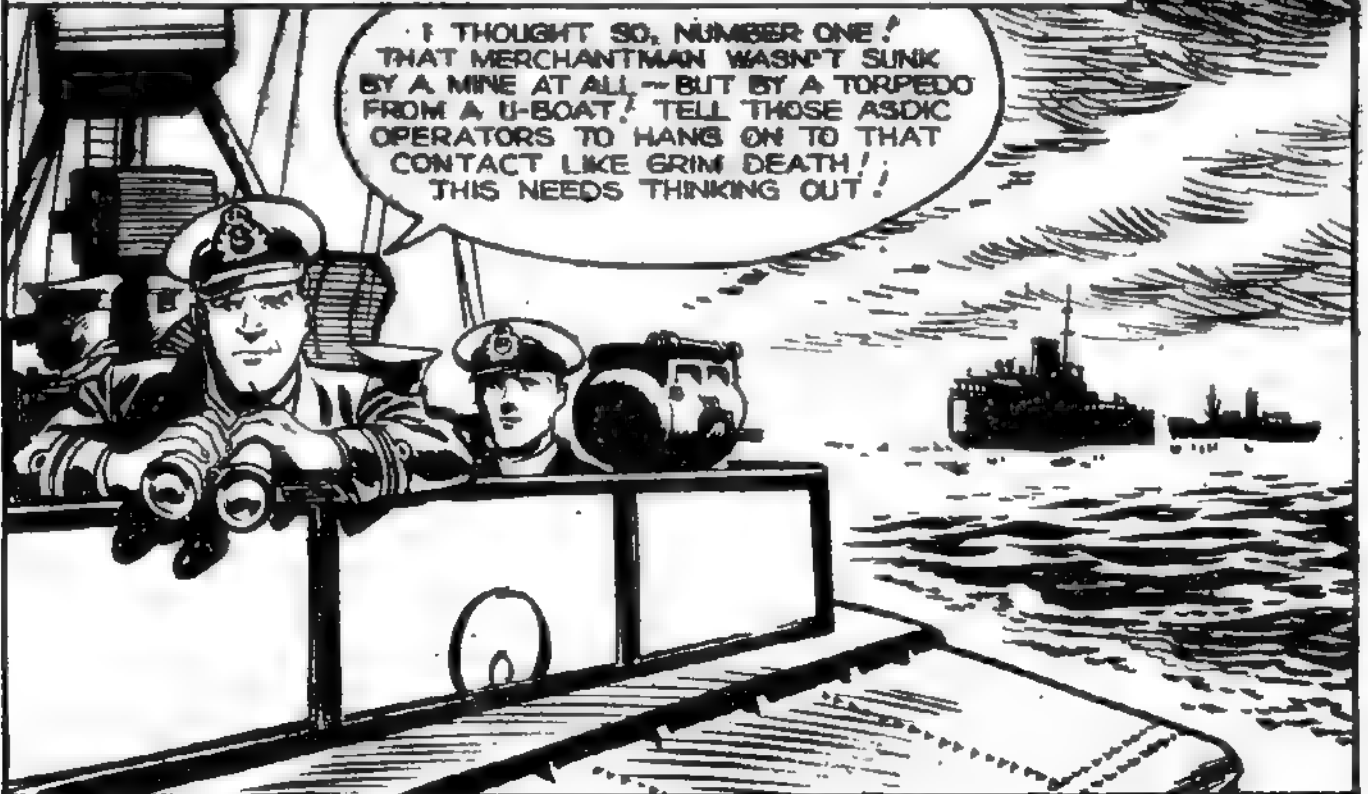
PUZZLED, THE TWO OFFICERS SCANNED THE SEA AND THE RESCUE SHIPS AHEAD. AND AT THAT MOMENT, IN THE ASDIC CABIN BELOW DECKS ...

BRIDGE FROM ASDIC ROOM! UNDERWATER CONTACT ON STARBOARD BOW. ONE MILE!



ONE MILE AHEAD OF THE *DIRK*. HER ASDIC SIGNALS WERE REBOUNDS FROM A SOLID OBJECT UNDER THE SEA'S SURFACE ...

I THOUGHT SO, NUMBER ONE! THAT MERCHANTMAN WASN'T SUNK BY A MINE AT ALL -- BUT BY A TORPEDO FROM A U-BOAT! TELL THOSE ASDIC OPERATORS TO HANG ON TO THAT CONTACT LIKE GRIM DEATH! THIS NEEDS THINKING OUT!





IT WAS A U-BOAT... AND THE SAME U-BOAT WHICH HAD CLAWED THE MERCHANTMAN INTO THE BLACK DEPTHS A FEW HOURS AGO.

BUT WE'RE HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE MINEFIELD ON THIS COURSE, SIR!

EXACTLY, NUMBER ONE! AND LET'S HOPE THE U-BOAT IS FOLLOWING US!





TOM SCOTT'S PLAN WAS A DARING ONE ... NOTHING LESS THAN THE LURING OF THE HIDDEN U-BOAT TO DESTRUCTION IN THE MINEFIELD. AND IN THE U-BOAT'S CONTROL ROOM AT THAT MOMENT ...



THE FIRST VITAL PART OF TOM SCOTT'S PLAN WAS WORKING. THE UNSUSPECTING U-BOAT HAD ALTERED COURSE TO FOLLOW THE *DYRK*. BUT ONE FALSE MOVE ON THE MINESWEEPER'S PART COULD SPELL DISASTER.



ONE MILE AHEAD BELOW THE SURFACE, A GERMAN JUNIOR OFFICER'S INTELLIGENT PROTEST WAS RUDELY DISMISSED BY HIS CONFIDENT CAPTAIN.

BUT, SIR, THE CHART SHOWS A BRITISH MINEFIELD AHEAD OF US ON THIS COURSE!

THE CHART IS WRONG, THEN, DUMKOPF! WOULD AN ENGLISH SHIP STEAM STRAIGHT INTO ONE OF ITS OWN MINEFIELDS? HOLD YOUR COURSE, HELMSMAN!

MEANWHILE, A.B. GINGER BRANNIGAN HAD BEEN SLEEPING PEACEFULLY IN HIS HAMMOCK, UNAWARE OF THE DRAMATIC EVENTS TAKING PLACE ABOVE HIS HEAD AND UNDER HIS FEET.

THE U-BOAT'S FOLLOWING US, SIR! YOUR PLAN IS WORKING!

A-A-H...!



RUBBING THE SLEEP OUT OF HIS EYES, GINGER WAS GREETED SUDDENLY BY ASTOUNDING NEWS FROM A SHIPMATE ...

EVER SEEN A U-BOAT'S PERISCOPE, GINGER? WELL, LOOK OUT THERE TO STARBOARD! THE PERISHER'S BEEN STALKING US FOR THE LAST HALF-HOUR!

LUMME!



THE U-BOAT'S PERISCOPE WAS CLEARLY VISIBLE ONE MILE AWAY ON THE DARK'S STARBOARD BOW. THE SIGHT OF IT ACTED ON GINGER LIKE A SPUR.

A U-BOAT OUT THERE -- AND THE DARK'S RUNNING AWAY FROM IT!





THERE COULD ONLY BE ONE REASON FOR THE *DIRK*'S EXTRAORDINARY LACK OF ACTION, THOUGHT THE YOUNG GUNNER WITH FIERCE CONTEMPT FOR HIS SHIPMATES. BUT *HE* WAS NOT GOING TO RUN AWAY.



HOT WITH ANGER, GINGER BRANNIGAN PELTED ACROSS THE FORWARD DECK TOWARDS THE FOUR-INCH GUN. BUT LEADING SEAMAN WHITEY BAKER HAD SEEN HIM ...



FLINGING HIMSELF ACROSS THE LAST SIX YARDS OF DECK, WHITEY SLAMMED INTO THE FLABBERGASTED GINGER AND BROUGHT HIM DOWN HEAVILY.



PERHAPS THE LEADING SEAMAN UNDERSTOOD THE YOUNG GUNNER'S ANGER AND SYMPATHISED WITH HIM. WHEN TOM SCOTT BAWLED HIS SHARP QUESTION FROM THE BRIDGE, WHITEY HELD HIS PEACE ...



BUT THE LEADING SEAMAN'S VOICE COULD BE AS ROUGH AS A STEEL FILE WHEN HE WANTED IT TO BE ...

YOU BIG-HEADED FOOL! THE SKIPPER'S TRYING TO ACT INNOCENT AND LURE THAT U-BOAT INTO THE MINEFIELD, AND YOU HAVE TO BE THE BIG I-AM WITH YOUR PRECIOUS GUN! IF THAT JERRY HAS SEEN YOU AND SUSPECTED SOMETHING, I'LL EAT YOU ALIVE!



UNWITTINGLY, SPURRED ON BY HIS BOUNDLESS CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF, THE COCKY YOUNG GUNNER HAD JEOPARDISED THE SUCCESS OF THE DIRK'S CUNNING PLAN. FOR KEEN AND RUTHLESS EYES WERE WATCHING HER DECKS FROM UNDER THE SEA.



THE U-BOAT CAPTAIN GRUNTED WITH RELIEF...AND WITH A FOOLHARDY CONTEMPT FOR HIS BRITISH OPPONENTS.

SO! IT WAS NOTHING! I THOUGHT A MAN WAS RUNNING TO THE GUN, BUT IT WAS ONLY ANOTHER OF THE STUPID ENGLISH GAMES! I WILL MOVE FORWARD NOW FOR THE KILL!





ALREADY, THE *DARK* WAS NEARING THAT DEADLY RED LINE ON THE CHART. TENSION MOUNTED ON HER BRIDGE.

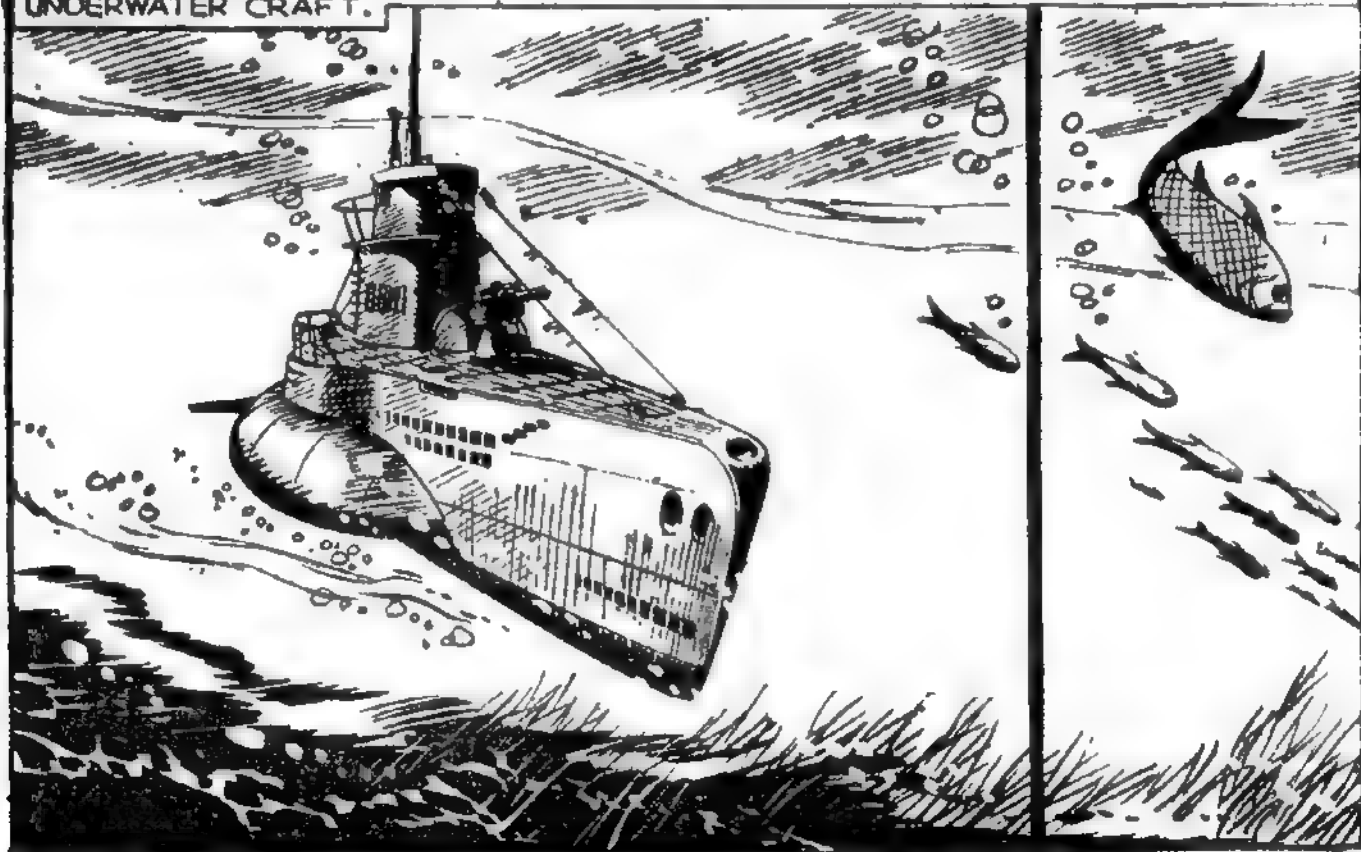
WE'RE ON THE EDGE OF THE MINEFIELD, SIR!

U-BOAT'S INCREASING SPEED, SIR!

GOOD, GOOD! IF JERRY'S QUICK, NUMBER ONE, WE MAY TRAP HER WITHOUT GOING INTO THE MINEFIELD OURSELVES.



AHEAD OF THE MINESWEEPER, THE U-BOAT HAD ALREADY CROSSED THAT INVISIBLE LINE WHICH DIVIDED SAFETY FROM DEATH. NOW, UNKNOWN TO HER CAPTAIN, DANGER LAY ALL AROUND THE FLIMSY HULL OF HIS RUTHLESS UNDERWATER CRAFT.



ON THE *DARK*, A RUFFLED AND REBELLIOUS ABLE SEAMAN GAVE VENT TO HIS DISGUST...

IT'S A LOT OF FLANNEL! TALK ABOUT LURING U-BOATS INTO A MINEFIELD! THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIGHT--WITH A GUN! BUT I WOULDN'T EXPECT ANYONE ON THIS SKIVVY SHIP TO KNOW WHAT A FIGHTING MAN WAS TALKING ABOUT!

HEAVEN HELP YOU, GINGER! IF THEY WAS TO FIRE YOU AT THAT U-BOAT, IT'D SINK FAST ENOUGH! THAT BONCE OF YOURS WOULD MAKE A RIGHT SOLID WARHEAD!

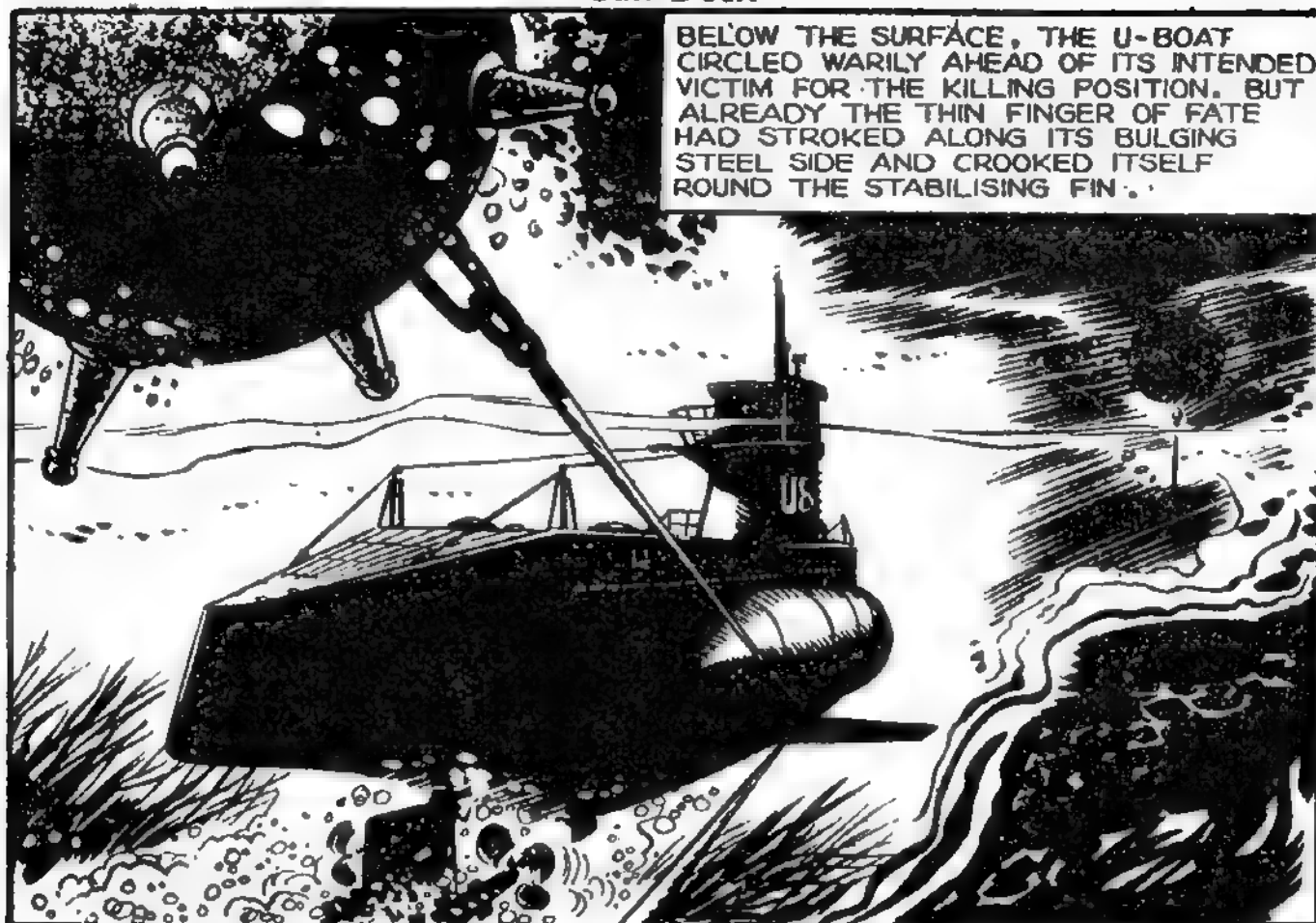


BUT DESPITE GINGER BRANNIGAN'S GLOOM, THE MINESWEEPER'S PLAN WAS WORKING.

WE'RE ALMOST IN THE MINEFIELD, SIR!

JERRY'S IN IT ALREADY, NUMBER ONE! LOOKS AS THOUGH HE'S MANOEUVRING FOR THE KILL! LET'S HOPE A MINE GETS HIM BEFORE HIS TORPEDO GETS US!





BELOW THE SURFACE, THE U-BOAT CIRCLED WARILY AHEAD OF ITS INTENDED VICTIM FOR THE KILLING POSITION. BUT ALREADY THE THIN FINGER OF FATE HAD STROKED ALONG ITS BULGING STEEL SIDE AND CROOKED ITSELF ROUND THE STABILISING FIN.

THAT FINGER WAS THE MOORING WIRE OF A MINE. BUT WOULD THE CANISTER OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE REACH THE U-BOAT'S HULL BEFORE ITS DEADLY TORPEDOES HAD BEEN UNLEASHED AT *H.M.S. DIRK*?

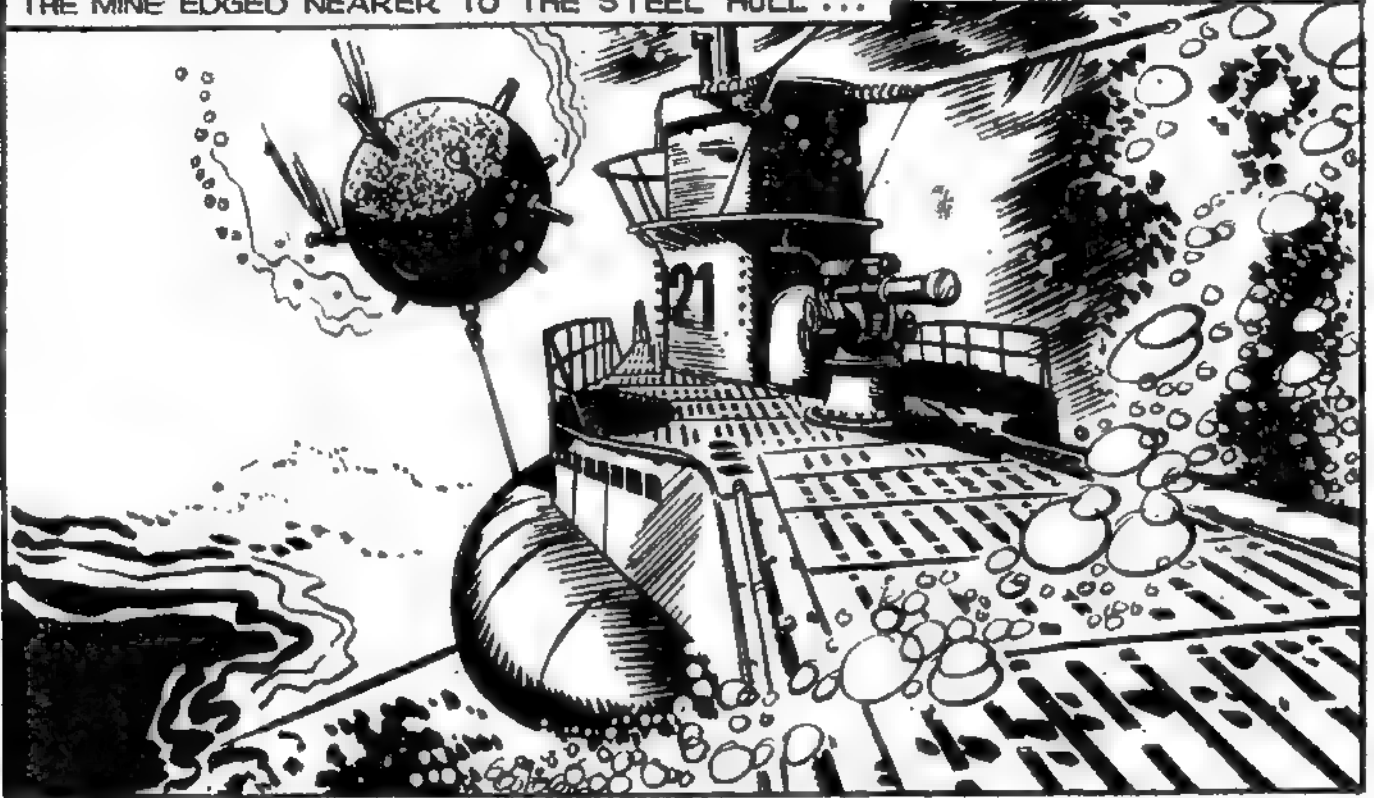


WE ARE IN POSITION!  
I WILL NOW SINK THIS  
ENGLISH WARSHIP!  
NUMBERS THREE AND  
FOUR TUBES, READY!

JA, HERR  
KAPITAN!



SLOWLY, THE U-BOAT'S TORPEDO TUBES LINED UP IN THE FIRING POSITION, AND AS THE BLUNT SNOUTS OF THE TWO EXPLOSIVE WAR-HEADS WERE UNCOVERED, THE MINE EDGED NEARER TO THE STEEL HULL ...



ON THE MINESWEEPER, EVERY OFFICER AND MAN KNEW THAT THE END WAS NOW NEAR...BUT WOULD IT BE THE END OF THE U-BOAT OR OF H.M.S DIRK?

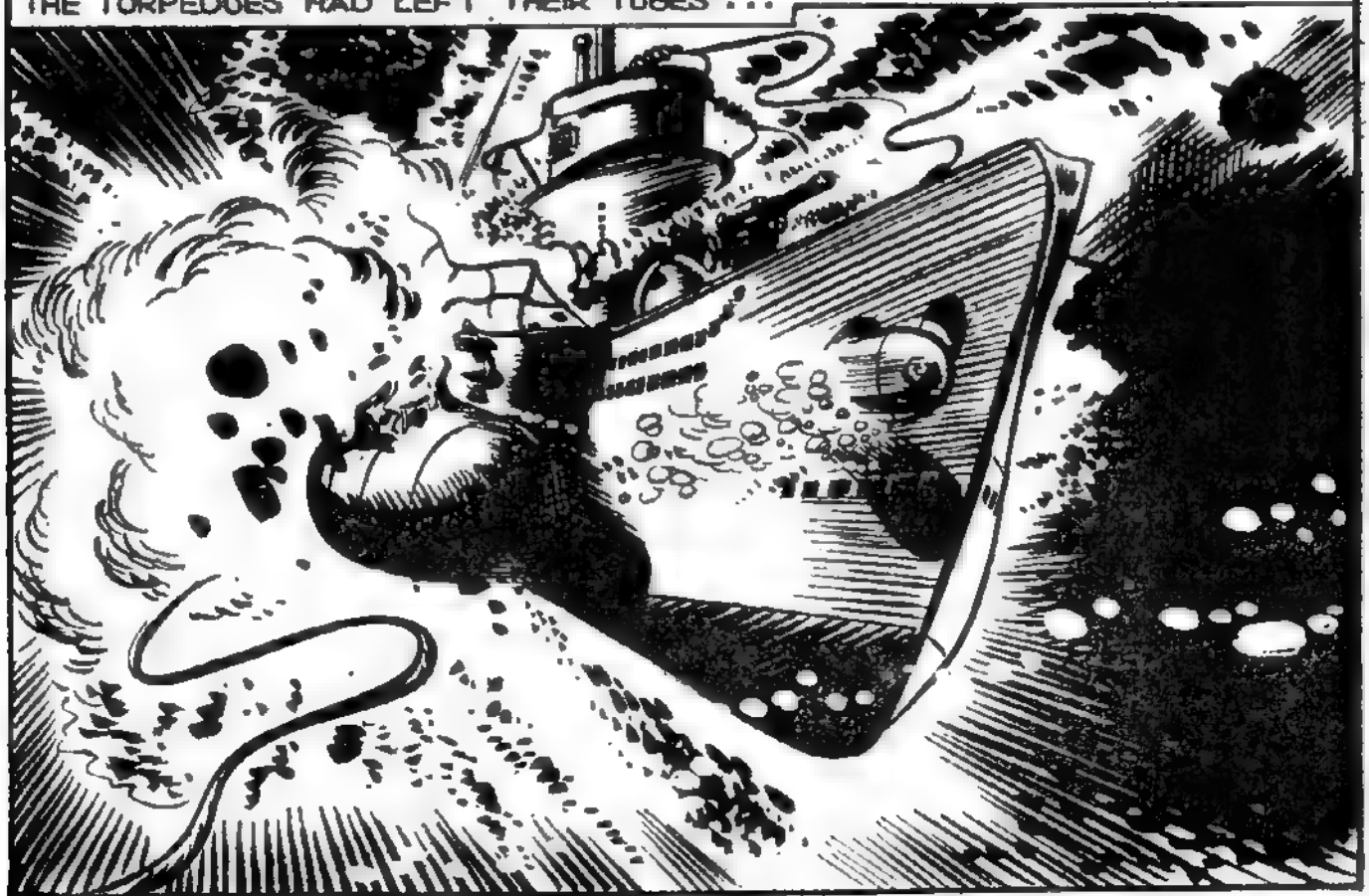


WITH LINGERING RELISH, THE GERMAN U-BOAT CAPTAIN LINED UP HIS SINISTER CRAFT FOR THE KILL. HIS EYES GLUED ON HIS VICTIM, HE GAVE THE FATAL ORDER ...

**FIRE  
ONE...  
FIRE  
TWO!**



WITH A FIERCE MISS, THE COMPRESSED AIR STARTED THE TWO TORPEDOES ON THEIR DEADLY ERRAND. BUT THE JERK OF THE U-BOAT'S HULL HAD GIVEN A SUDDEN TUG TO THE TRAPPED MOORING WIRE OF THE MINE, AND BEFORE THE TORPEDOES HAD LEFT THEIR TUBES ...



THE HORNS OF THE MINE BROKE AGAINST THE U-BOAT'S HULL, AND MINE AND TORPEDOES WENT UP TOGETHER IN ONE VAST TORTURED EXPLOSION OF WATER AND SPLINTERED METAL.



EVEN IN THAT MOMENT OF TRIUMPH, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER TOM SCOTT REMEMBERED HIS CREW AND THE PART EVERY MAN HAD PLAYED IN IT.



## Gun Deck

IN HIGH SPIRITS, THE CREW OF THE *DIRK* GATHERED AT THE RAIL TO SEE THE LAST OF THEIR TREACHEROUS ENEMY. ONLY ONE MAN TURNED AWAY ...



WHAT'S  
WRONG WITH  
OLD GINGER?

PERHAPS HE WANTED  
TO SINK THAT U-BOAT  
SINGLE-HANDED WITH  
HIS POP-GUN!

SICK OF THE *DIRK*, AND ITS CREW, AND THE CHANCE OF GLORY THEY HAD DENIED HIM, GINGER BRANNIGAN ANGRILY ANSWERED THE JOKES OF HIS HAPPY SHIPMATES.

BY THE TIME THE MINESWEEPER HAD REACHED COWES ROADS THE YOUNG GUNNER HAD MADE UP HIS MIND. HE WAS NOT APPRECIATED ON THE *DIRK*, BUT THERE WERE MANY OTHER SHIPS IN THE ROYAL NAVY.

NEVER MIND, GINGER! MAYBE WE'LL MEET THE *BISMARCK* NEXT TRIP OUT, AND YOU CAN SINK THAT ALL ON YOUR LONESOME!

FUNNY, AREN'T  
YOU! YOU MAKE  
ME SICK!



I DON'T FIT IN  
ON THE *DIRK*,  
BUT I KNOW  
WHAT I'LL DO  
WHEN WE GET  
TO POMPEY...





# Chapter 3 FIGHTING SWEEPER



ALREADY THE NEWS OF THE DIRK'S SUCCESS, RADIOED AHEAD, HAD PERCOLATED THROUGH THE SHIPS GATHERED FOR THE INVASION IN PORTSMOUTH DOCKS. CHEERS GREETED THE LITTLE MINESWEEPER, BUT TO GINGER BRANNIGAN THEY WERE BITTER...



CHIEF, I WANT TO PUT IN A REQUEST FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CAPTAIN!

OKAY, SONNY! IT'LL PROBABLY BE AFTER DIVISIONS, TOMORROW MORNING!

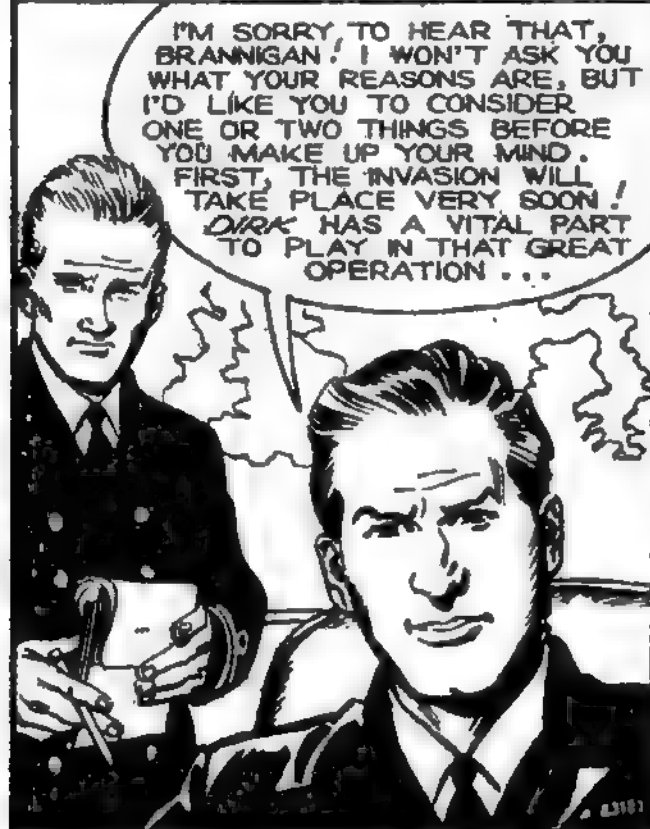


THE LAWS OF THE ROYAL NAVY GIVE EVERY MAN THE RIGHT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH HIS CAPTAIN. NEXT MORNING, ABLE SEAMAN BRANNIGAN EXERCISED THAT RIGHT...

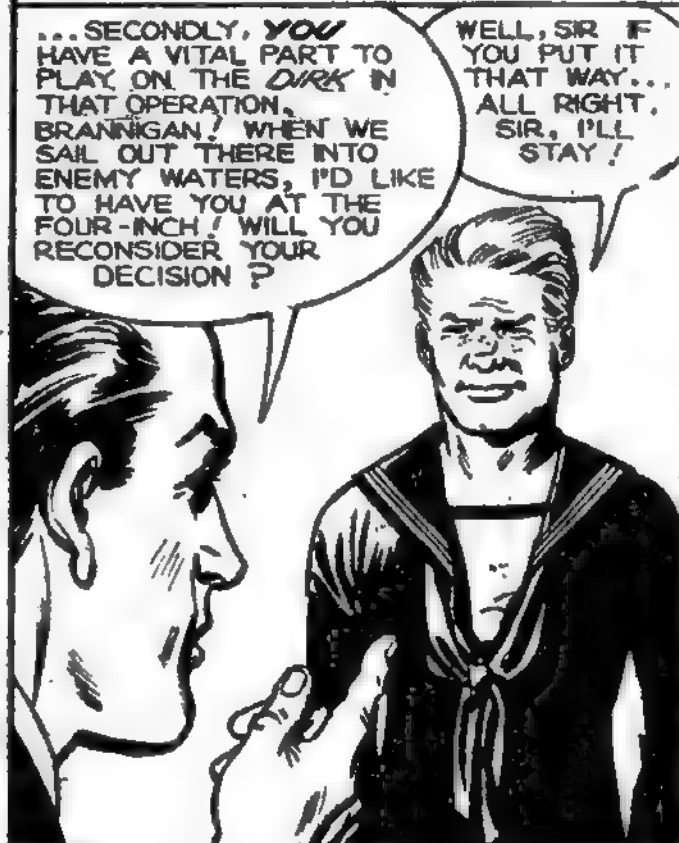
WELL, BRANNIGAN?

A REQUEST, SIR, TO TRANSFER FROM THE DIRK!

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER SCOTT FROWNED ...



THE YOUNG SKIPPER LEANED FORWARD EARNESTLY ...



THE SKIPPER'S SINCERITY HAD PERSUADED GINGER AGAINST HIS WILL. BUT ONE THING HE HAD SAID HAD BEEN MORE IMPORTANT TO THE YOUNG GUNNER THAN PERHAPS HE KNEW.



IN THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN, THE FIRST LIEUTENANT GRINNED ...

PITCHING IT A BIT HIGH, WEREN'T YOU, SIR? ALL THAT ABOUT BRANNIGAN BEING VITAL?

DO YOU THINK SO, NUMBER ONE? BUT I MEANT EVERY WORD OF IT! BRANNIGAN'S VITAL -- AND SO IS EVERY ONE OF MY SHIP'S COMPANY FROM YOU TO THE COOK! IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT NOW, YOU MAY BY THE TIME D-DAY'S OVER!



AT MIDNIGHT TWO WEEKS' LATER, THE WISE YOUNG SKIPPER AND THE CREW HE BELIEVED IN TOOK THEIR TOUGH LITTLE CRAFT OUT INTO THE STREAM. THE 27TH. MINESWEEPING FLOTILLA, SPEARHEAD OF THE INVASION FLEET, WAS UNDER WAY.



D-DAY HAD DAWNED ~ AND LEADING THAT MIGHTY ARMADA WHICH WAS TO MAKE HISTORY WAS A HANDFUL OF TINY SHIPS WITH A PERILOUS JOB TO DO. THE MINESWEEPERS WERE TO CLEAR THE TEETH FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH ITSELF.





## Gun Deck

AS THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN STREAKED THE SKY BEYOND HITLER'S THREATENED STRONGHOLD OF OCCUPIED EUROPE, QUIET ORDERS WENT OUT TO THE FLOTILLA FROM THEIR LEADER. FOR THE 27TH, THE INVASION WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN.

WELL, HERE WE GO, NUMBER ONE! STOP BOTH STREAM SWEEPS!



SLOWLY THE SIX MINESWEEPERS TOOK UP THEIR POSITIONS IN THE ECHELON. SIX SETS OF SWEEPING GEAR DROPPED INTO THE SEA, WIRES AND CUTTERS READY. A NEW ORDER WAS SENT OUT ...

ACTION STATIONS! GUN CREWS CLOSE UP!

THAT'S ME!



THE METALLIC VOICE FROM THE LOUDSPEAKER ELECTRIFIED GINGER BRANNIGAN. AT THE PROSPECT OF ACTION, HIS SULKY GLOOM WAS FORGOTTEN. SWIFTLY HE TURNED ...

GOOD LUCK, GINGER!

COR! THANKS, MATE!



## Gun Deck

H.M.S. *Dark* WAS THE OUTSIDE SHIP ON THE STARBOARD WING, KEEPING STATION, AS THEY STEAMED STRAIGHT IN TOWARDS THOSE LOW AND SINISTER CLIFFS HELD BY THE GERMAN ENEMY.



THE DARK SHORE WAS BARELY HALF-A-MILE AWAY WHEN THE SWEEPERS TURNED INTO LINE AHEAD. STILL THE ENEMY MADE NO SIGN. WERE CUNNING EYES WATCHING THE LITTLE SHIP SO CLOSE TO THEM AS SHE BEGAN TO TURN?



THE MURDEROUS BATTLE TO PRISE EUROPE FROM THE BLOODSTAINED HANDS OF HITLER WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN. AS *DARK* TURNED HER EXPOSED FLANK TO THE SHORE, AN OMINOUS SHAPE EMERGED FROM THE BLACK SHADOW OF THE CLIFF.

TARGET IS THE  
END SHIP...  
**FIRE!**



## Gun Deck

THE FIRST SHOT OF D-DAY HAD SHATTERED THE BREATHLESS SILENCE OF LAND AND SEA, AND THE STINK OF CORDITE WHIPPED OVER THE OAK'S DECK ...

ALL RIGHT, MEN,  
THIS IS IT! ALL GUNS  
THAT BEAR, OPEN FIRE!  
YOU KNOW WHAT THE  
TARGET IS!



THE QUIET VOICE OF THEIR SKIPPER STEADED THE RACING PULSES OF THE OAK'S CREW COOLLY AND BELLIGERENTLY. THE LITTLE SHIP PREPARED TO FIGHT, AND AT THE FOUR-INCH GUN ...

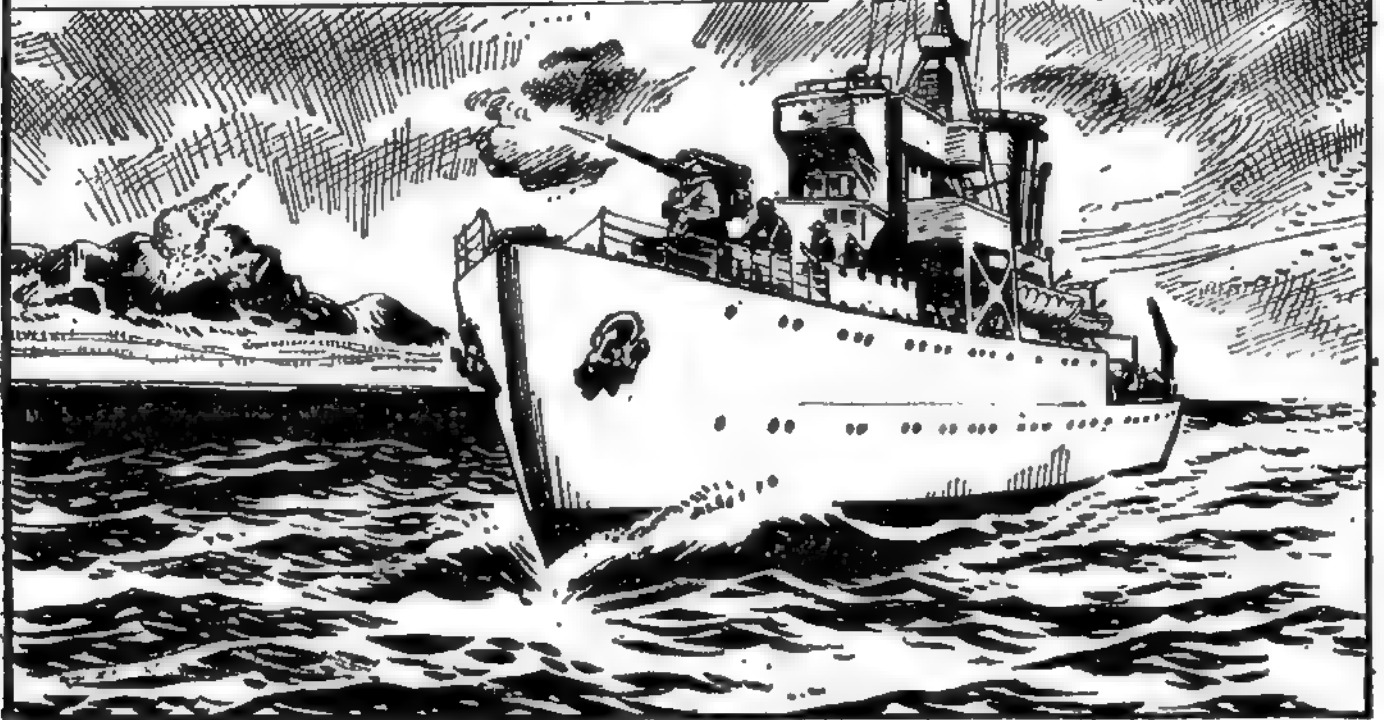
I'VE BEEN  
WAITING FOR THIS,  
MATES! NOW  
I'LL SHOW YOU  
HOW TO FIGHT!





## Gun Deck

ABLE SEAMAN GINGER, BRANNIGAN HAD SUFFERED LONG ENOUGH. NOW IT WAS TIME FOR HIM TO GET HIS OWN BACK ON THE GERMANS AND ON HIS OWN SHIPMATES. BUT EVEN AS HIS FINGER RELEASED THE FIRST VICIOUS SHELL FROM THE FOUR-INCH GUN, THE ENEMY GUN FIRED AGAIN.



WITH DEADLY ACCURACY, THE BIG GERMAN SHELL TRAVERSED THE HALF MILE OF INSHORE WATER IN TEN WHINING SECONDS ... AND STRUCK HOME!



THE *DIRK* SHUDDERED UNDER THAT HEAVY BLOW. THE SHELL HAD EXPLODED WITH STUNNING VIOLENCE BETWEEN THE BRIDGE AND THE GUN DECK AND THE SHIP'S BOWS YAWED...

SHE'S NOT ANSWERING THE HELM, SIR! THE CONTROLS FROM THE WHEELHOUSE MUST HAVE BEEN SHOT THROUGH!

GET SOME MEN TO RIG HAND-STEERING! FIND OUT WHAT THE DAMAGE IS AND REPORT! WE'RE A SITTING TARGET FOR JERRY, SO HURRY!

HELPLESSLY, *H.M.S. DIRK* SWUNG ROUND WITH THE TIDE, HER STEERING GEAR USELESS, HER DECKS EXPOSED TO THE MURDEROUS FIRE OF THE BIG GERMAN GUN ON THE CLIFF. BUT THAT GUN WAS SILENT...

QUICKLY, YOU SWINE! ONE PALTRY BRITISH SHELL, AND OUR GUN IS OUT OF ACTION! FIT UP THE NEW RANGE FINDER AND WE WILL BLOW THAT MINESWEEPER OUT OF THE WATER WHILE SHE IS HELPLESS TO ESCAPE!



GINGER BRANNIGAN'S FIRST SHELL HAD HIT THE CONCRETE PLATFORM AND SMASHED THE VITAL GERMAN RANGEFINDER EQUIPMENT. THERE WAS STILL A CHANCE FOR THE *DIRK*...

LOOKS AS THOUGH *DIRK*'S DISABLED, SIR! THEY'LL PULVERISE HER IF SHE LIES THERE MUCH LONGER! CAN WE...

NO, LIEUTENANT! I WANT TO HELP HER AS MUCH AS YOU DO, BUT THE REST OF THE FLOTILLA MUST GET THIS AREA CLEARED OF MINES BEFORE THE LANDING CRAFT COME IN! I'M AFRAID THE *DIRK* WILL HAVE TO FEND FOR HERSELF!



HELPLESS AND ON HER OWN, THE DISABLED MINESWEEPER HAD BEEN SORELY HIT...

WELL, NUMBER ONE?

STEERING'S PACKED UP, SIR! BUT WE'LL HAVE IT WORKING AGAIN IN TEN MINUTES! THE SHELL STARTED A FIRE NEAR THE FORWARD MAGAZINE! APART FROM THE DANGER OF THE WHOLE LOT GOING UP, WE CAN'T GET ANY SHELLS UP TO THE FOUR-INCH! DIRECTION FINDER COMMUNICATION IS CUT, TOO.



FROM HIS POST AT THE BREECH OF THE FOUR-INCH GUN, GINGER BRANNIGAN HEARD THAT DISMAL REPORT AND GROANED ...

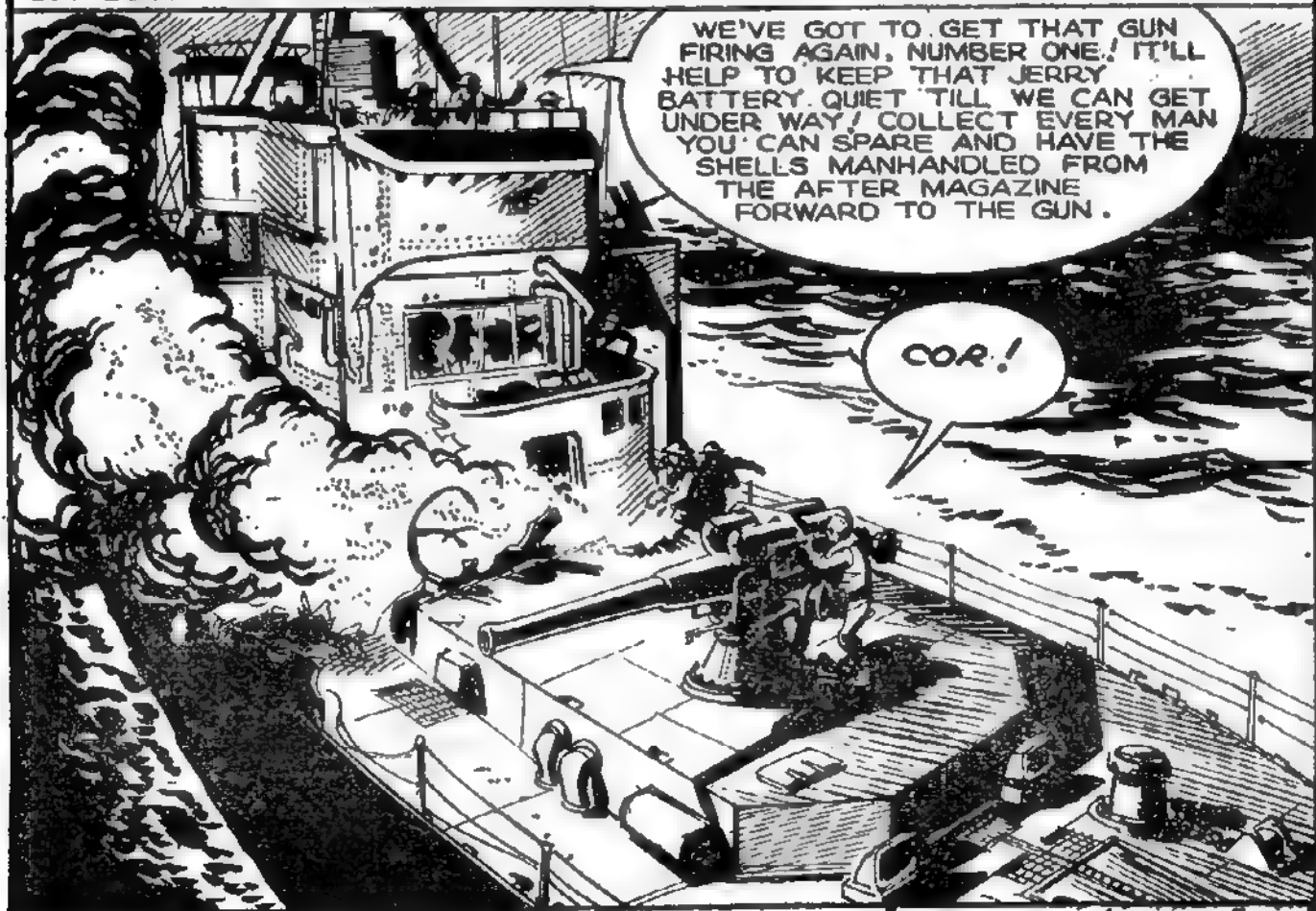
ONE MEASLY ROUND,  
AND THE GUN PACKS  
UP! BANG GOES MY  
CHANCE TO SHOW  
THEM! I'M ABOUT AS  
VITAL TO THE *DIRK*  
NOW AS THE REST  
OF THEM ARE!



BUT LIEUTENANT COMMANDER SCOTT'S VOICE WAS COOL AND UNDISMAYED ...

WE'VE GOT TO GET THAT GUN  
FIRING AGAIN, NUMBER ONE! IT'LL  
HELP TO KEEP THAT JERRY  
BATTERY QUIET TILL WE CAN GET  
UNDER WAY! COLLECT EVERY MAN  
YOU CAN SPARE AND HAVE THE  
SHELLS MANHANDLED FROM  
THE AFTER MAGAZINE  
FORWARD TO THE GUN.

COR!





GINGER BRANNIGAN HEARD THOSE AGGRESSIVE WORDS AND GAINED A NEW FIGHTING COURAGE. WHEN THE FIRST LIEUTENANT REACHED HIM ...

CAN YOU STICK IT HERE, BRANNIGAN? YOU'RE SITTING ON A VOLCANO-- AND YOU'LL HAVE TO LAY THE GUN BY THE SIGHTS!

IF THE BLOKES CAN GET THE SHELLS HERE, SIR, I CAN STICK IT!



AT ANY MOMENT THE DECK BELOW HIM MIGHT DISAPPEAR IN THE MIGHTY EXPLOSION OF AMMUNITION. ALREADY THE HEAT FROM THE FLAMES WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE. BUT GINGER BRANNIGAN HAD LEARNED A GREAT TRUTH...

WE'LL GET THE SHELLS TO YOU, BRANNIGAN! THERE'S EVERYONE FROM THE COOK TO THE OFFICER'S STEWARD IN THAT MANHANDLING CHAIN! AND THE REST OF THEM ARE BELOW YOU, FIGHTING THAT FIRE!

STONE ME! THE WHOLE BLINKIN' LOT OF THEM'S FIGHTING!



EVERY MAN ON THAT HARD-PRESSED SHIP, OFFICER AND RATING, WAS A VITAL PART OF THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL. NO LONGER WAS GINGER BRANNIGAN ALONE. HIS SHIPMATES WERE FIGHTING AT HIS SIDE.



NOW THE YOUNG GUNNER REALISED THAT THOSE MEN HE HAD DESPISED HAD BEEN FIGHTING AT HIS SIDE ALL THE TIME, ONLY HE HAD BEEN TOO CONCEITED TO SEE IT.



ALONG THE NARROW DECK, PASSED FROM HAND TO HAND, THE FOUR-INCH SHELL REACHED GINGER'S GUN. IT WAS LEADING SEAMAN WHITEY BAKER, WHO SLAMMED IT INTO THE BREECH.



HIS EYES GLUED TO THE GUN SIGHT, GINGER BRANNIGAN GAVE THE KILICK THE ANSWER IT HAD TAKEN HIM SIX BITTER MONTHS TO LEARN ...



WITH A FIERCE AND VEHEMENT PRECISION, GINGER ALIGNED THE SIGHTS ON THE CLIFFSIDE BATTERY. ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY MEN WERE BEHIND HIM AS HE PRESSED THE FIRING BUTTON, AND HE KNEW THEY WERE THERE AND WAS GLAD.





STILL HELPLESSLY TRAPPED OFF THAT HOSTILE BEACH, H.M.S. DIRK WAS HITTING BACK WITH OBSTINATE AND SAVAGE DEFIANCE.



HARDLY HAD THE BIG GERMAN GUN BEEN MADE READY FOR ACTION, THAN THE DIRK'S SECOND SHELL SLAMMED AGAINST THE CLIFF FACE OVERHEAD. A STORM OF ROCK SPLINTERS DROVE THE SOLDIERS BACK IN PANIC.



## Gun Deck

EVEN IN THE STRESS OF BATTLE, GINGER BRANNIGAN REMEMBERED THAT HIS SHIPMATES WERE MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO FIGHT BY THEIR OWN FIGHTING COURAGE.



THE HEAT ABOVE DECK WAS FIERCE; BELOW DECKS IT WAS INTOLERABLE. THE MEN FOUGHT DOWN THERE WITH A CRUEL AND MERCILESS ENEMY, AND DEATH STOOD AT THEIR ELBOW.



ON THE DECKS AND BELOW THEM, IN THE ENGINE ROOM AND ON THE BRIDGE, THE CREW OF THE *DIRK* FOUGHT TO SAVE THEIR SHIP. AND AT LAST ...



AS THE BOWS OF THE *DIRK* SWUNG AWAY FROM THE HOSTILE SHORE, GINGER BRANNIGAN TRAVERSED HIS GUN TO MAXIMUM DEFLECTION AND SENT A LAST DEFIANT SHELL AT THE ENEMY.



THE *DIRK*'S SHELLS HAD DEMORALISED THE GERMAN GUNNERS ON THE CLIFF FACE. COUNTLESS MEN OF THE INVADING BRITISH ARMY WOULD OWE THEIR LIVES THAT DAY TO A DAUNTLESS MINESWEEPER AND ITS FIGHTING CREW.

GOOD LUCK,  
ARMY!

THANKS FOR  
PASTING THAT  
SHORE BATTERY  
FOR US, NAVY!





AS THE *DARK* SWEEPED OUT TOWARDS THE OPEN SEA, LEADING SEAMAN WHITEY BAKER WENT FORWARD WITH A NEW RESPECT TO THE LONELY FIGURE IN THE BOWS.



THIS WAS GINGER BRANNIGAN'S MOMENT OF GLORY. BUT NOW HE WANTED ONLY TO SHARE IT...

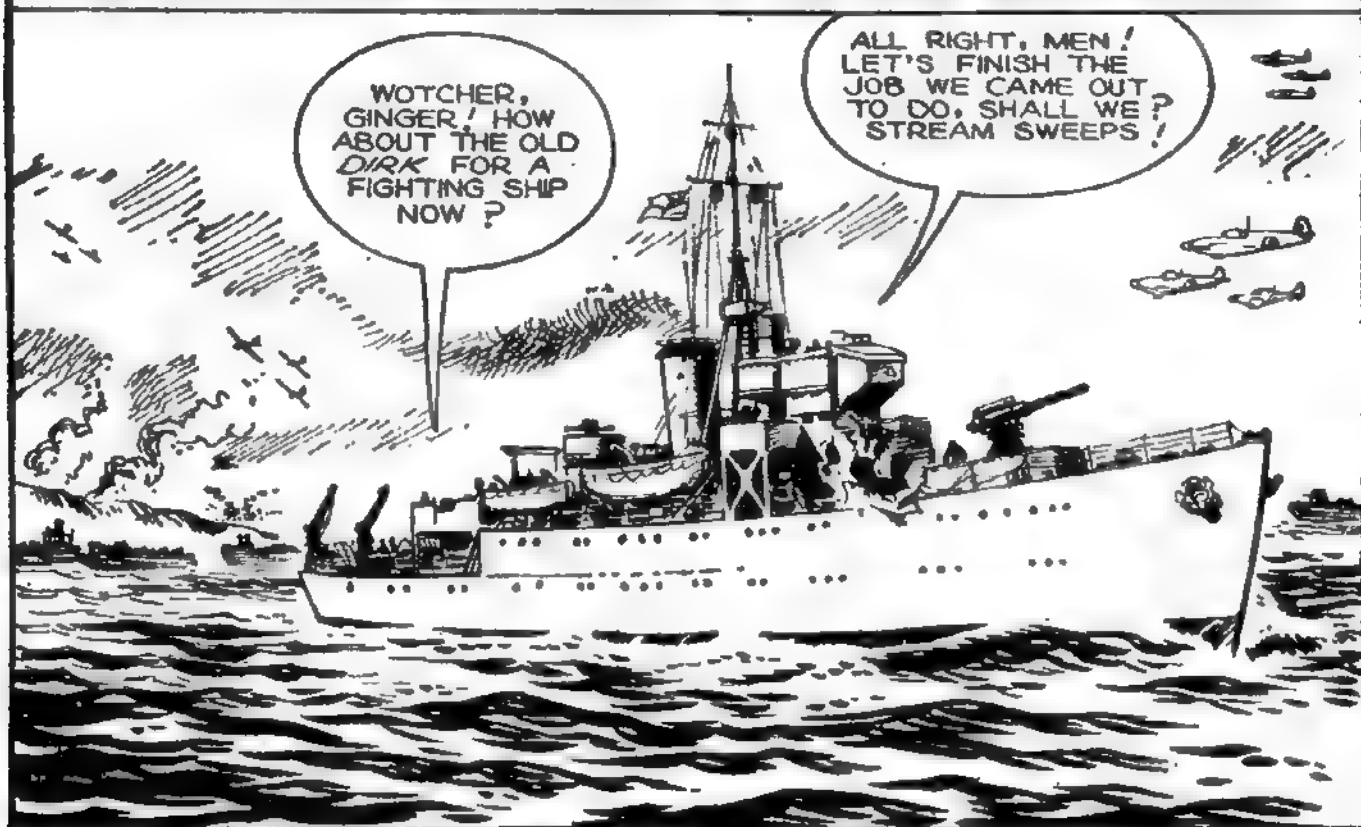
I 'AVE, WHITEY, 'AVEN'T I? BUT THE FUNNY THING IS, I DON'T FEEL BIG-HEADED ANY MORE! WHAT ABOUT THOSE CHAPS DOWN IN THE AMMO STORE, AND THE CHAIN GANG!

WE'RE **ALL** RUDDY HEROES, THAT'S WHAT IT IS, GINGER!



## Gun Deck

TOGETHER, THE KILICK AND THE ABLE SEAMAN WENT AFT TO JOIN THEIR SHIPMATES. BATTERED BUT STILL FULL OF FIGHT, *H.M.S. DIRK* WENT BACK TO HER GRIM AND UNCEASING STRUGGLE WITH THE ENEMY BENEATH THE SEA.



THAT EVENING, WHEN THE *DIRK* HAD HOISTED HER SWEEPS AND WAS HEADING FOR HER ENGLISH BASE, A CHEERY VOICE HAILED GINGER FROM THE W.T. OFFICE...



TOM SCOTT HAD NOT OVERLOOKED THE TENACIOUS BRAVERY OF THE YOUNG ABLE SEAMAN AT THE DIRK'S FOUR-INCH GUN. AND SIX WEEKS LATER, IN PORTSMOUTH DOCKYARD ...



HIS EYES MISTY, GINGER BRANNIGAN LOOKED DOWN AT THE MEDAL HE HAD COVETED FOR SO LONG. THEN HE REMEMBERED ...



## Gun Deck

WITH ANOTHER KIND OF COURAGE, ABLE SEAMAN BRANNIGAN FACED HIS COMMANDING OFFICER ...

IT'S LIKE YOU ONCE SAID, SIR. I WAS VITAL TO THE *DARK* BECAUSE I FIRED THAT GUN! BUT IF THE SHELLS HADN'T REACHED THE GUN I COULDN'T HAVE FIRED IT! NOR I COULDN'T IF THE FIRE HAD GOT TO THE AMMO AND BLOWN ME SKY-HIGH! SO THE WAY I LOOK AT IT, THIS MEDAL BELONGS TO THE *DARK*, SIR, AND EVERY BLOKE THAT MANS IT!



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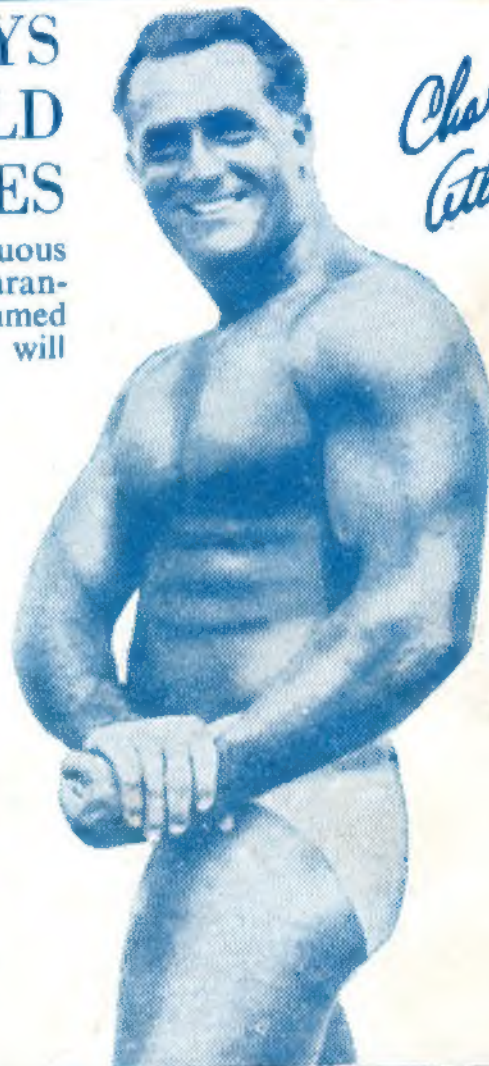
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